



Making Life Easier
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Take Care of Your Brain

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How you behave and what you eat and drink affect how well your brain functions. After birth, you do not grow any new brain cells, so it is important to take care of the ones you have. Mysteries remain about the brain's mechanics, but it is not a magical organ. Just as certain foods or even emotions affect your body, they also affect your mind.

To keep your brain functioning well, take care of both your body and mind.

- Eat balanced meals and be sure to get the necessary nutrients. Carbohydrates cause the brain to release serotonin, a chemical that increases your sense of well-being. Protein helps keep you sharp and alert. Omega-3, a fat found in fish, has been shown to enhance memory and fight off Alzheimer's disease. You also can take supplements such as fish oil capsules or neuromins, a vegetarian option made from sea plants that fish eat. Studies have shown that vitamin D helps many people feel more enthusiastic, inspired and alert.
- Don't let your blood sugar fall too low. Research shows that the right levels of blood sugar enhance memory storage. Further, low blood sugar can make anyone cranky. Eating candy for a quick fix is not the solution; when your blood sugar rises suddenly, it will drop just as dramatically leaving you feeling lethargic. Rather than eating three big meals, eat several small, well-balanced meals throughout the day to keep blood sugar at healthy levels.
- Get adequate sleep to recharge your brain.
- Drink at least eight glasses of water a day; drink more when you exercise or when the weather is very dry. When you are dehydrated, you are likely to feel stressed out, tired, grumpy, headachy, dizzy and nauseated. Remember that alcohol and caffeine can cause dehydration.
- Wear seat belts and protective helmets. Car, bicycle and motorcycle accidents are leading

causes of serious brain damage.

- Consult your doctor if you want to try herbs such as ginkgo biloba, huperizia serrata and gota kola. They may improve memory function, but scientists are not sure.
- Avoid drugs and excessive alcohol. Using these substances kills brain cells. Drugs and alcohol also can cause confusion, lack of coordination, incontinence, tremors and abnormal eye movements.
- Exercise to stay healthy and happy. Exercise stimulates your body to increase certain chemicals with an antidepressant effect.

Tips for keeping your mind active and your memory sharp:

- Exercise your memory. If you have difficulty remembering people's names or whether or not you locked the door, you may be able to use mnemonic devices (memory tricks) to help. There are many books available that can help you increase your memory skills.
- Write things down to remember them. This not only provides you with a record of information, but also forces you to think about what you are writing, thereby increasing the likelihood that you will remember the information.
- Find activities you like that also keep your brain active. Reading interesting books, watching brain-engaging movies and discussing them with friends, and doing crossword puzzles are examples of such activities. Though you can't increase the number of brain cells you have, active use of your brain helps produce molecules that keep brain cells and the links between them active.
- Learn to meditate. Meditation decreases stress and helps you breathe efficiently. Too much or too little oxygen in the bloodstream can affect mental performance.

The Internet, books and magazines also offer useful information about new vitamins, herbal therapies and activities that enhance the brain's performance.

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